



Report on the Handles Beta Test

In March 2007, representatives from several GPO business units formed a team to conduct a Handles pilot project. Results of the project were to support GPO's Federal Digital System team on its implementation of Handles.

Handles, like PURLs, are persistent identifiers for Internet resources. Both PURLs and Handles resolve through an intermediary database which can be updated to reflect changes in the location of the internet resource.

At the request of GPO's Chief Information Officer, Library Services and Content Management (LSCM) staff initiated the creation of Handles in August 2007. After conducting internal (alpha) tests, an external (beta) test was announced at the Depository Library Council Conference in October 2007.

The purpose of the beta test, which ended November 26, 2007, was to gauge the Federal depository library community's response to Handles and to a range of possible naming conventions. The Handles naming conventions fell into two broad categories – intelligent (containing descriptive characteristics) and non-intelligent (containing no descriptive characteristics and created or assigned automatically).

Beta Test Results

The test, which was conducted from October 15, 2007 through November 26, 2007, revealed the following:

- * Access to the requested documents using the Handles was satisfactory.
- * There is less interest in the technical aspects of Handles creation and naming than in their utility and other aspects outside the scope of the survey.
- * Some libraries would prefer some descriptive content in Handles but not at the risk of jeopardizing their accuracy by increasing the likelihood of typographical errors.
- * Non-intelligent naming conventions would be acceptable.

Recommendations

- * Handles names should be easily (i.e., machine-) generated and have as much "intelligence" as possible without making them prone to error.
- * Handles should be assigned as early in the ingest process as possible.

Requirements

- * The library community requires a robust GPO initiative to resolve the problem of broken PURLs, especially in U.S. Catalog of Government Publications (CGP) records.
- * In order for PURLs to resolve through the Handle server, Handles need to be created for the approximately 90,000 PURLs that currently exist.

Conclusion

The depository community is more interested in the functionality of persistent names than the specific format utilized to create them.



- * Next stages of the PURLs to Handles transition require a coordinated planning effort between LSCM and other areas of GPO.
- * Security and support issues involved in continuing the use of PURLs emphasize the need to expedite the transition to Handles.
- * Implementation is planned via future FDsys releases.